



**Queensland University of Technology**  
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Doggrell, Sheila A.](#) (2012) Writing eBooks to support first year students. In *First Year in Higher Education Conference*, 6 July 2007, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/63501/>

**© Copyright 2007 Please consult the author**

**Notice:** *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

# Writing eBooks to Support First Year Students.

Sheila A Doggrell  
School of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Health,  
Queensland University of Technology.

## Abstract

*A potential use of eBooks is to write them to specifically support first year students. Such eBooks have many advantages over published books, including tailored content and flexibility. One initiative was to write an eBook called “Getting Started” as part of a bridging course for 100-200 accelerated students in Nursing, who were about to have their first year at University at second year level. This was a formative activity to be undertaken by the students prior to the start of study. Another initiative was the writing of an eBook called “Pharmacology in One Semester”, which is available to all students, including the accelerated students, in a second year Unit. This is a plain English language version of pharmacology, which has been unpacked from the standard textbooks to improve the learning of the students. Both of these initiatives have been welcomed by the accelerated students.*

## Introduction

Unfortunately, eBook has become to mean the equivalent of a published book, which is available in electronic form, and can be read on computers or other electronic devices. This ignores the potential and flexibility that can be achieved by writing an eBook that primarily exists in an electronic form. After discussing this potential and flexibility, two initiatives in developing and using eBooks for accelerated students, who are having their first year experience at University, are outlined.

*The potential of eBooks* (combined from Looney & Sheenhan, 2001; Educause 2006; Plumb, 2008; Doggrell et al 2011)

- Most textbooks are very good but contain more information than can reasonably be taught to the students. An eBook can limit the information to what can be taught.
- Most textbooks pack information in a condensed form (for economic reasons). With eBooks, academics can unpack material so that students can grasp and comprehend it more easily. To do this, eBooks have to be written in Plain English Language.
- Suitable textbooks are too expensive to expect all the students to be able to afford to purchase. An eBook can be supplied, over Blackboard, for no charge, or supplied for a much lower price than the textbook. This increases accessibility to written material for the less well off students.
- Textbooks take quite a long time to produce, and are often out of date when they are published. An eBook can be constantly updated, and thereby be more current than a textbook. eBooks can also be used as an intermediary between the topics of a unit/course and recent literature.

- For commercial reasons, textbooks are often designed to be suitable for a range of students. An eBook can be a tailored resource for the one group of students and their unit/course. Thus, an eBook can have content that is tailored to the learning outcomes for individual units/courses.
- Plain language eBooks/eChapters are very popular with international students, accelerated students, and students with jobs. These students affirm that eBooks/eChapters help them in their learning.

*The flexibility of an eBook (Doggrell et al 2011)*

- An eBook can be flexible by continuing to be developed and updated – a new version can appear every day/week/month/semester/year. Also, new authors and reviewers can be added on an ongoing basis.
- The eBook adds flexibility for the learning of students. Despite being developed as an eBook, in addition to being read on an electronic device, eBooks can be printed out. Thus, eBooks can be used to fit the learning style preferred by the student. The students can attend the lectures or not, but still read the eChapters associated with the teaching. Both internal and external students can use eBooks in their learning. International students often like to listen to the audio of the lecture, and read the eChapters in their own time e.g. stopping and starting.
- The teacher decides the content they want to use and can create their own eBook from the available eChapters. Thus, many eBook can be specifically designed for different cohorts using a framework eBook.
- If the eBook is left in a format that can easily be changed (e.g. Word document), the teacher is able to change any of the content in individual eChapters to suit their teaching or class. For instance, if a teacher has their own good story/anecdote, it can be added, and the example given in the original/framework eBook can be removed.
- For some subjects, there may be flexibility in choice of eChapters. Thus, eChapters at different levels may be prepared and made available in a framework eBook, so that the teacher decides which version is more applicable to the cohort they teach.

At QUT, there are large numbers of accelerated students in the Nursing course. Thus, between 100 and 200 accelerated students, are enrolled directly into second year Units in Bioscience and Pharmacology each year. We have developed two eBooks to help these students. One initiative was to write an eBook called “Getting Started” as part of a bridging course for accelerated students. Another initiative was the writing of an eBook called “Pharmacology in One Semester” for the pharmacology Unit they undertake in their first semester at University.

### **“Getting Started”**

We have a successful strategy for supporting these accelerated students in second year Units in bioscience and pharmacology, which improves the retention of these students (Doggrell et al 2011a). One component of this strategy is an eBook called “Getting Started”, and this was developed as a formative activity for the accelerated students. The background to this activity, is the suggestion that one of the factors that has a positive impact on the retention of

students in their first year is formative assessment in the early phase of programs, and that this assessment should have feedback (Yorke, 2001).

At QUT, in the weeks before the start of semester, a formative website activity that considers some basic concepts common to the bioscience/pharmacology units were posted on a Community website set up on Blackboard for the accelerated students. This “Getting Started” website has eChapters, specifically prepared for the accelerated students on:

- Medical and anatomical terminology
- Cell to tissues
- Tissues to body
- Homeostasis
- Physiological feedback mechanisms
- Binding sites – the Keys to Pharmacology
- Physiological Processes – Links to Pharmacokinetics

These eChapters are supported by self-help quizzes, consisting of MCQs posted on the Community website, with feedback for each correct and incorrect answer.

The eBook is very popular with the students that find and use it. Unfortunately, we have difficulty contacting the students early enough before semester, for them to find it, and use it, before semester starts. We are continuing to work on this operational matter.

In the future, we are planning to combine all components of the bridging course into an eBook. Thus, in addition to “Getting started”, there will be the “O week” workshop (which gives an introduction to the community and Unit blackboard site, a synopsis of the QUT library resources, information about employing effective learning strategies, and a previous accelerated student discussing how to “survive” the bioscience and pharmacology Units) and the Resource Lectures, consisting of introductory anatomy, physiology and microbiology material. This eBook will be available for early delivery to the accelerated students.

### **Pharmacology in One Semester**

In 2009, I set up a new second year Unit (Pharmacology for Health Professionals), which was initially taught to Nursing and Paramedical students, and subsequently, also to Optometry and Podiatry students. This is the only Unit in pharmacology that the students receive, but they do also cover therapeutics in other Units. The largest cohort in LSB384 was the Nursing students, and this cohort contained about 100-200 accelerated students who were either domestic or international students who had completed enrolled nursing courses or were graduates in any subject (e.g. music, linguistics).

The eBook for the Pharmacology Unit combined most of the potential features of eBooks for Units e.g. it was an unpacked/simpler (Plain English Language) version of pharmacology. This would be helpful to all the students, but particularly to the accelerated students, who were taking this Unit in their first semester at University. After lecturing, each week I release the eChapters relating to the teaching on Blackboard. The students can then decide what to do with the eChapters. Many of them do download them, and build up a book. Not only is the eBook designed to cover the lecture material, but it also contains most of the information, the students need to complete the reinforcement case study tutorials in the Unit, and is used extensively by the students.

The eBook is very popular with the students. Thus, the most common comment made by the students in their evaluations is that the best part of the Unit was the eBook.

Thus, when the students were surveyed about the Unit, one of the questions was “*Did you use the eBook?*”

*O Yes, please comment below*

*O No, please comment below*

*Aspects you could comment on: What did you use it for? Was it useful? What were the best and worse things about the eBook?*

*If you did not use the eBook, why not? On reflection, do you think it would have been useful to have used it?”*

The following responses were received, which were very positive:

- I used the ebook to find things that were not clear to me from the lecture, to go over and remember what the lecture was about to prepare for tutorials and to prepare for exams and assignments. The ebook is the most useful tool that I used to study for LSB 384 and it would be very beneficial if there will be ebooks for other subjects as well.
- I did use the ebook regularly. If there was something in the lectures notes that I found challenging to understand, the ebook was a good source to clarify. I liked that it contained the same content as the lecture notes but written in full sentences as opposed to dot points. It's a bit like reading what the lecturer says in the lecture. I've also used the ebook to study for exams
- AMEN YES I DID.....Fantastic content and VERY helpful....thank you Shelia
- The eBook was/is fantastic! It was extremely useful and still is even though the class is finished. I still take them to work and read them in my break just because I find the content interesting. The eBook basically summarises the textbook in plain language I can understand. I wish all my classes had eBooks. The eBook is definitely be far my favourite learning tool. I don't have anything negative to say about it
- I found the eBook very useful throughout the course and would have been completely lost without it. It is succinct, reasonably self explanatory and detailed what Sheila says in the lectures. If it were removed from the course I believe students would struggle with the text books, which are very varied in their content and relevance.
- Yes, I thought this was the most helpful part of the unit as I could access it time and again to help with my study. I found this to more comprehensive than other texts I have used in this area and easier to understand!
- I used the ebook to review the chapter I learned. It is very useful. The best thing is that it is easy to read and understand. But maybe the size of words can be a bit larger.
- I found the ebook extremely useful for finding information for tutorial questions and throughout the semester. I downloaded each week's topic and did a cut & paste in Word, and have bound the whole lot for revision, as I go through and highlight sections I really want to remember – just to be picky – it would have been nice to have an index of the all the different drug names, so they could easily looked up
- On my god the eBook was so amazing and easy to read. I used it for everything. I found like it pulled me into the thing I was trying to learn. Only thing that could

improve would be that if we talk a little more on the actually drugs that are commonly used in hospitals and stressed on hints to remember the drugs E.G. prils, satins, lol and so on. This was only touched on a little bit but it's actually one of the best things to know

Subsequently, this eBook has become multi-authored and national as 'Pharmacology in One Semester' (Doggrell et al 2011). A major advantage of doing this was to allow review of the eChapters, before the eBook was made available to the students. This eBook has many of the flexibility features e.g. it acts as a framework eBook.

In conclusion, eBooks designed for, and used by, accelerated students in Nursing at QUT, have been well received by the students, and may be useful in retaining students and improving their learning.

## References

Doggrell, S.A, Davis, E., Hart, J., Hinton, T., Mullaney, I. (2011) A new development in teaching: the eBook 'Pharmacology in one semester'. ASCEPT-AUPS-HSBRCA joint meeting 4-9 December 2011, Perth, Australia. Abstract

Doggrell, S.A., Polkinghorne, A., Craft, J., Dallemagne, C., Pavasovic, A. (2011a) A successful strategy for supporting nursing students given advanced standing into pharmacology and bioscience units. ASCEPT-AUPS-HSBRCA joint meeting 4-9 December 2011, Perth, Australia. Abstract

Educause. 7 things that you should know about E-Books. (2006) Retrieved 9th March, 2012, from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7020.pdf>

Looney MA, Sheehan M. Digitizing education – a primer on eBooks. (2001) Retrieved 9th March, 2012, from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0142.pdf>

Plumb, G and the Program and Courseware Enhancement Group (SET). (2008) The development of eBooks for delivering course materials. Retrieved 9th March, 2012, from <http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/edjournal/node/317>

Yorke, M. (2001) Formative assessment and its relevance to retention. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 20(2), 115-126.

## Session outline

Writing eBooks to Support First Year Student (15 mins):

- ▶ The potential of eBooks
- ▶ The flexibility of eBooks
- ▶ 'Getting started'
- ▶ 'Pharmacology in One Semester'

Group Discussion (15 mins):

- ▶ Do you think writing eBooks could help you support your first year students?
- ▶ Could National eBooks (bioscience, nursing topics) be developed to support accelerated students in Nursing?